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# COVID-19

# **Business Impact Snapshot**



American Society of  
Landscape Architects

June 2, 2020

# Survey Overview

As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) forces changes to business practices globally, ASLA aims to provide an objective assessment of the impact that COVID-19 is having on members' businesses.

An online survey was conducted among ASLA members who have identified as firm principals or as holding a leadership position within their organization.

ASLA represents approximately 15,000 members in the landscape architecture field in the United States. According to the latest US Census Bureau data available (2017), over 5,100 landscape architecture firms operate in the US, employing more than 25,000 personnel.

The survey was designed to:

- Assess the initial impact COVID-19 is having on ASLA members' businesses.
- Provide insight into how businesses are responding to the crisis.
- Determine which factors are currently having the greatest impact on the business operations of ASLA members.
- Identify and share best practices that can provide inspiration to members seeking to manage their businesses through these difficult circumstances.

## Survey at a Glance

A total number of 272 individuals responded to the online survey.

Survey data was collected between May 7-17, 2020.

## Where do survey respondents work?

- 71% landscape architecture firms
- 25% multidisciplinary firms
- 3% design-build firms
- 1% federal, state, or local government

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# Key Findings

## Business Impacts

- Asked to rate the impact of COVID-19 on a scale ranging from 5 to -5—with 5 being positive, -5 being negative, and 0 being neutral—ASLA members' responses averaged out to a -1.70.
- Midwest and Northeast regions of the country are experiencing more reductions in project leads and projected annual revenue than the West and South.
- Topping the list of factors having the greatest negative impact on businesses include downward adjustment of revenue projections for the year (65%), challenges with remote work (52%), and contracts going on hold (50%).

## Employee Retention

- Two key areas of concern for employers include ensuring the health and safety of employees and the unpredictability of the future, including economic unpredictability and uncertainty of when and how to return to work.
- Employers have already implemented the following measures to retain employees: creating more staggered, flexible, and part-time work options (38%); changing office layout to maximize physical distancing (33%); enabling permanent remote work / work from home project types (30%).
- Almost 60% of survey respondents said they applied for financial relief via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Over 90% were successful in obtaining loans through the Payment Protection Program (PPP) or Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL).

## Business Projections

- The hospitality, corporate/office, and campus/education sectors have been impacted most negatively by the crisis, while the infrastructure, healthcare, resilient design and planning, and single-family residential design sectors are trending slightly positive.
- A majority of respondents foresee the pandemic impacting their day-to-day operation for longer than six months: through December 2020 (33%), through June 2021(29%).

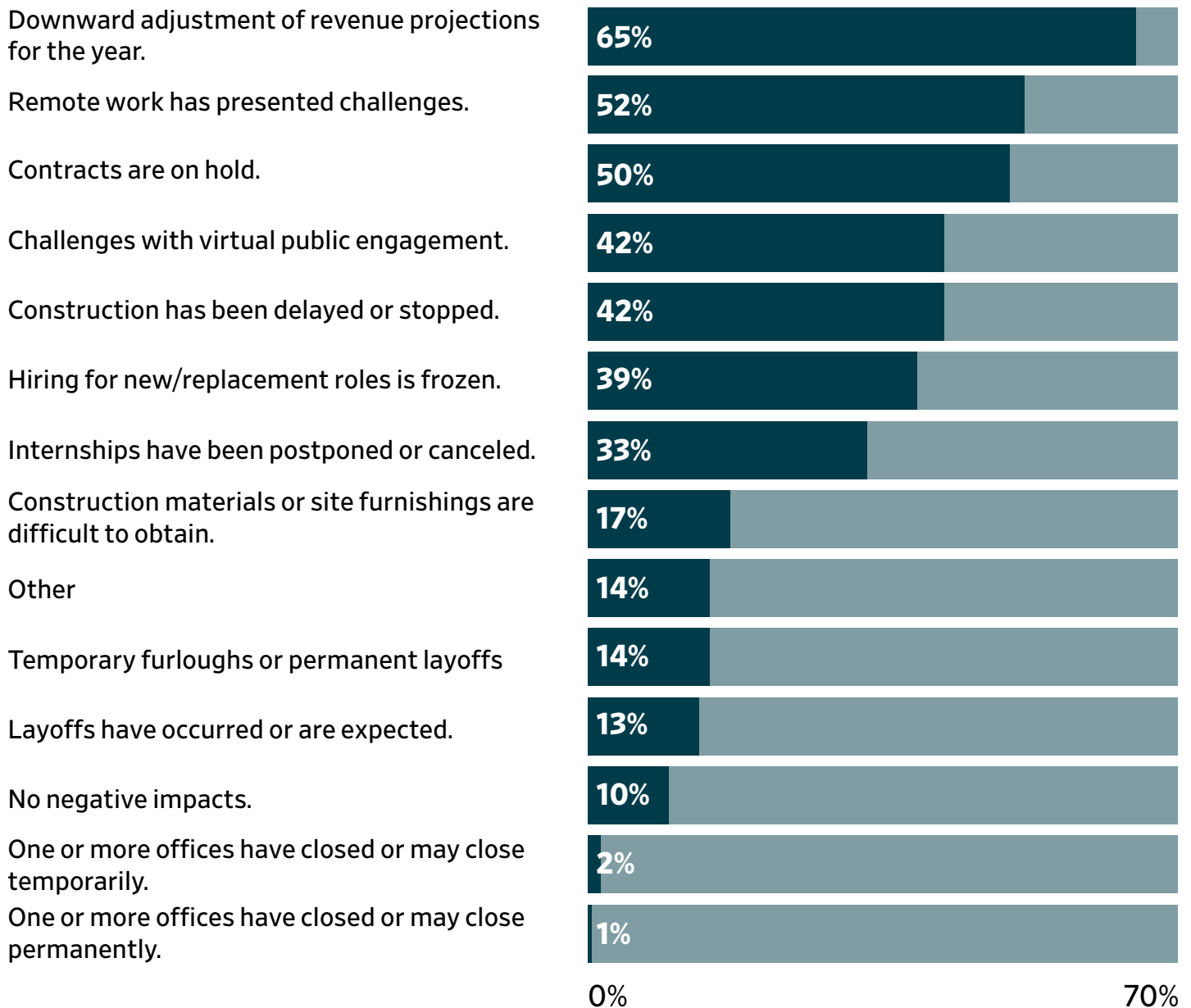
# Overall Impact of COVID-19 on Business

Asked to rate the impact of COVID-19 on a scale ranging from 5 to -5—with 5 being positive, -5 being negative, and 0 being neutral—ASLA members' responses averaged out to a -1.70.



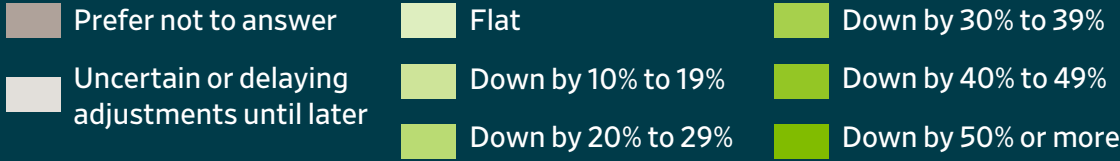
# Factors Impacting Business Operations

**Q:** What, if any, negative impacts has your firm/department/organization experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic since March 1, 2020?



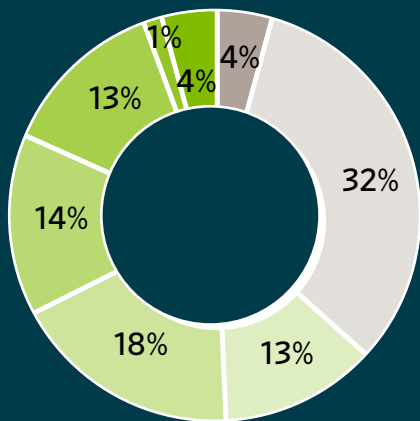
# Revenue Projections

**Q:** If your company/organization has revised revenue projections downward for the year, please estimate the change.



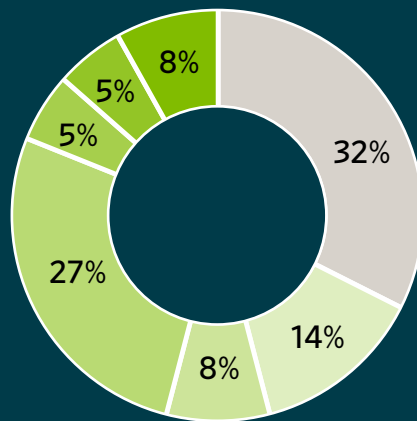
## West

Pacific (AK, CA, HA, OR, WA)  
Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY)



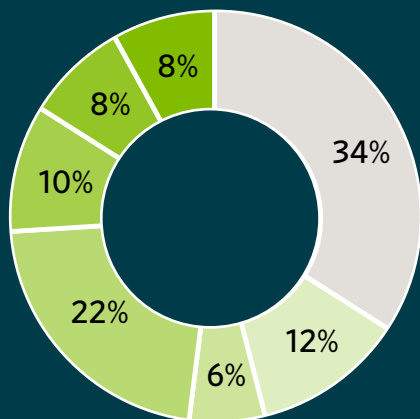
## Midwest

East North Central (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)  
West North Central (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)



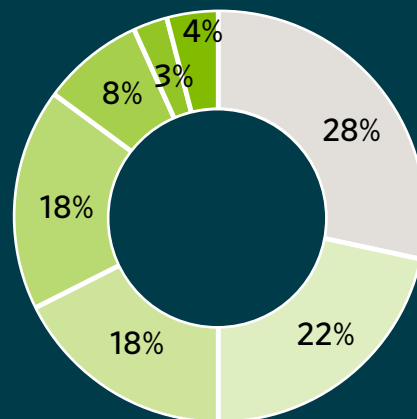
## Northeast

New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)  
Mid-Atlantic (NJ, NY, PA)



## South

South Atlantic (DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, DC, WV)  
East South Atlantic (AL, KY, MS, TN)  
West South Atlantic (AR, LA, OK, TX)



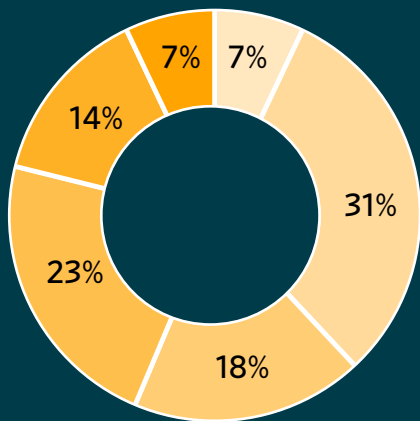
# Reductions in Project Leads

**Q:** What reduction in new project leads has your company/organization experienced that you believe is due to COVID-19?

- Prefer not to answer
- Down by 25%
- No reduction
- Down by 50%
- Down by less than 10%
- Down by more than 50%

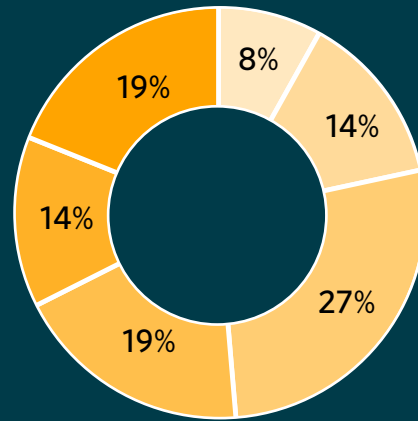
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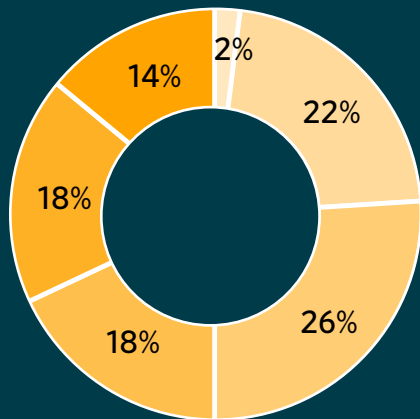
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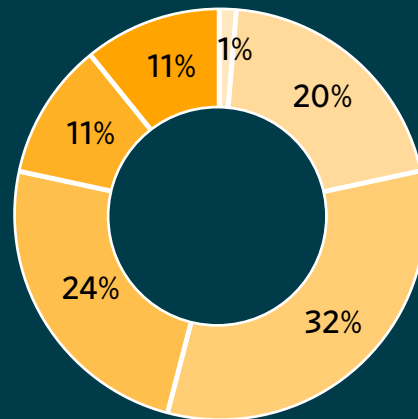
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East South Atlantic (AL, KY, MS, TN)  
West South Atlantic (AR, LA, OK, TX)



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# Proactive Measures

**Q:** What proactive measures are your firm/department/organization taking to maintain contact with clients whose projects are delayed and/or to cultivate new business opportunities for the future?



## Communication

“Regular contact, e-mails, personal phone calls, thought leadership articles, website, LinkedIn and social media.”

“We are emailing/calling/writing letters to remind existing and new clients that we are still here and working to help them.”

“Virtual meetings and hosting webinars on funding and training for clients”

“Lots of touching base via phone, web meetings and email. We are trying to help them adjust by sharing lessons learned, tips, and technology.”

## Maintaining high quality service

“As always, our best business development is to perform exceptional service and quality on existing projects and with existing clients.”

“We continue to work remotely with clients and contractors to ensure that projects started before COVID continue uninterrupted, and we continue to make site visits, practicing safe distancing, wearing masks, etc.”

“Regular communications and extra generation of preliminary concepts to keep them engaged.”

“Educating clients on how they can keep things moving using technology and letting them know we are available to help.”

“Setting up modified payment plans for accounts receivables for clients hit by the economy.”

“For current clients—developing initiatives for grants, or virtual public involvement to move projects along”



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# Proactive Measures

**Q:** What proactive measures are your firm/ department/organization taking to maintain contact with clients whose projects are delayed and/or to cultivate new business opportunities for the future?

## Cultivating new business

“For new business, we are responding quickly to inquiries and we are not turning up our nose to projects that in the past we might not have interest in.”

“Reaching out to old client base, looking at new advertising options, brainstorming options for different work models.”

“Exploring new marketing avenues...thinking about recreating services post covid and other outside the box forms of income.”

“For residential work: advertising we can do the contract remotely with minimal/no face to face contact.”

“Looking to more public sector work as the private sector slows; try to reduce operating costs where feasible; reach out to our clients on a weekly basis to get a sense of the economic conditions”

“Quick response time to new inquiries, looking for RFP grants and reaching the network of architects and engineers”

“Providing video sessions for potential clients we would have seen at conferences.”

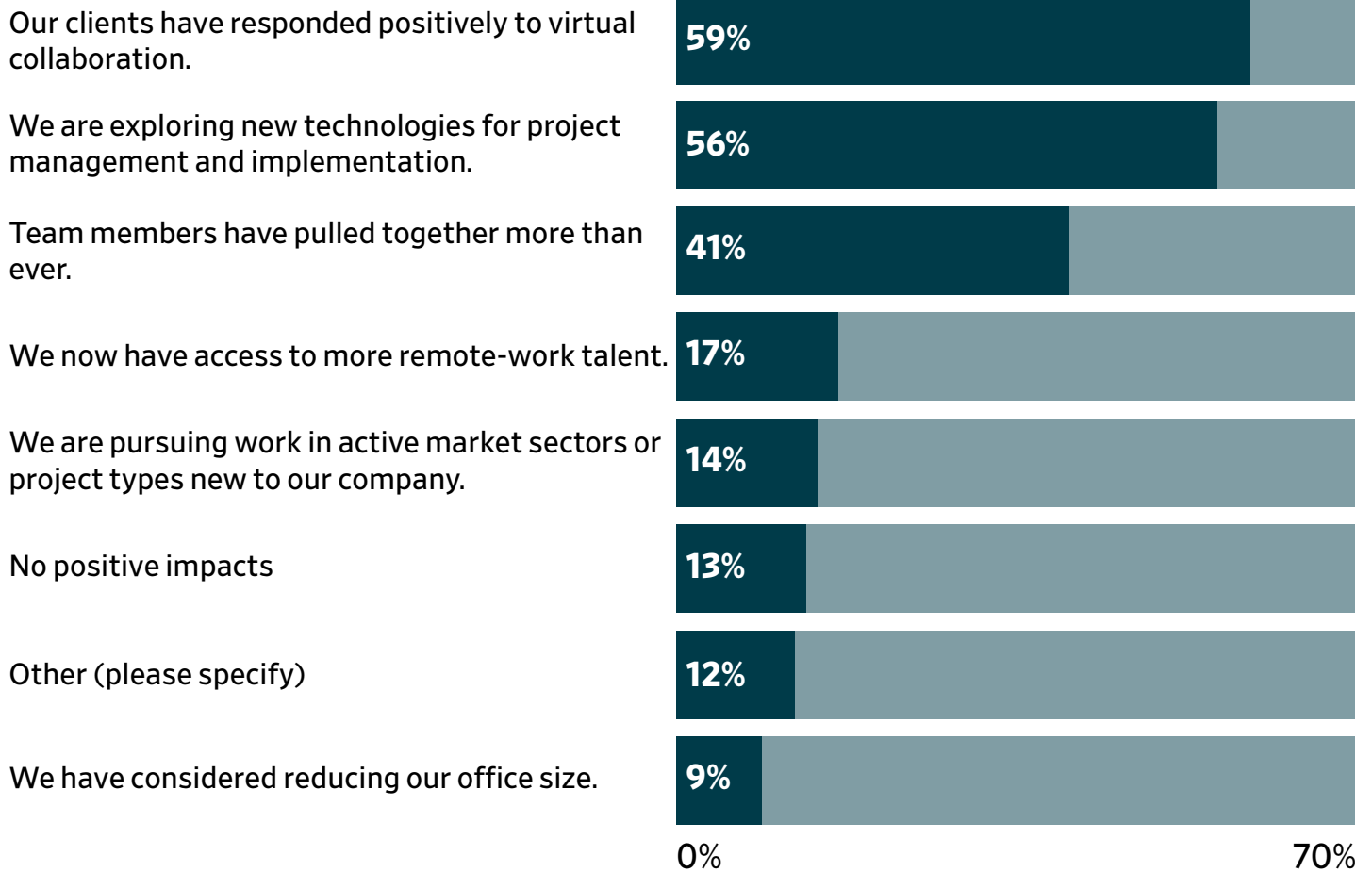
“Catching up on making the office more efficient, streamlining systems and brainstorming any pivots that could lead down new paths.”

“Marketing for the positive aspect of being at home in a beautiful yard. We blog weekly, maintain constant communications with our current clients regarding status updates and progress.”

“Maintaining advertisements in magazines, submitting projects for awards. Instagram presence.”

# Positive Impacts on Business

**Q:** What, if any, positive impacts have your firm/department/organization experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic?



“We now see that working remotely works and that hurdles we may have envisioned in the past are no longer an issue”

“We have developed an excellent rapport with our current clients regarding the challenges we face in our work and everyone is more reasonable and accommodating about deadlines and deliverables.”

“Refinement of cloud based file storage has simplified my work process. Access from anywhere in the world with WiFi or phone tethering.”

“We spend more time with our kids”

“Increase in new residential design work leads because people want to redo their yards, since they are expecting that they will need to entertain outdoors. Also more play for kids.”

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# Business Challenges

**Q:** What are your greatest challenges and/or decisions for your business as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Two key areas of concern arose from the responses—ensuring the health of employees and the unpredictability of the future, including economic unpredictability and uncertainty of when and how to return to work.

## Health and safety

As states begin to reopen, many employers are concerned with how to do so by protecting both the mental and physical health of their staff. Comfort levels about returning to the office will vary, and employers recognize that they may need to accommodate different personal situations.

Top challenges include:

- Securing personal protective equipment (PPE) for their staff
- Creating policies for returning to work—how to phase in staff coming back
- Practicing physical distancing while still getting collaborative work done
- Ensuring staff safety while conducting site visits and construction contract administration services

## Business operations

With so much economic uncertainty, business leaders are challenged with how to reduce spending and maintain workload. Some firms are delaying technology upgrades or reducing staff hours to balance budgets. Others are concerned with fixed expenses like software licenses, insurance, or rent.

Additional challenges include:

- Collecting accounts receivable/delayed client payments
- Considerations of downsizing leased office space and extending work from home to reduce overhead
- Difficulty attracting talent for those firms that are looking to hire

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## Other key concerns

### Marketing and client communication challenges

- Keeping clients engaged and positive about the future
- Creating new marketing strategies to gain new leads
- Helping clients see a path forward to avoid cancelled or postponed projects
- New ways of interacting with clients and stakeholders in a field that is generally highly collaborative (especially single-family residential and design-build)

### Firm culture challenges

- Maintaining personal connections with entry-level staff for mentoring and training
- Keeping a sense of community within our office while working from home
- Managing stress levels of staff
- Maintaining a motivated remote working staff

### Remote work challenges

- Inability to travel
- Delays in communication and production of plans
- Creating secure remote infrastructure
- Maintaining production

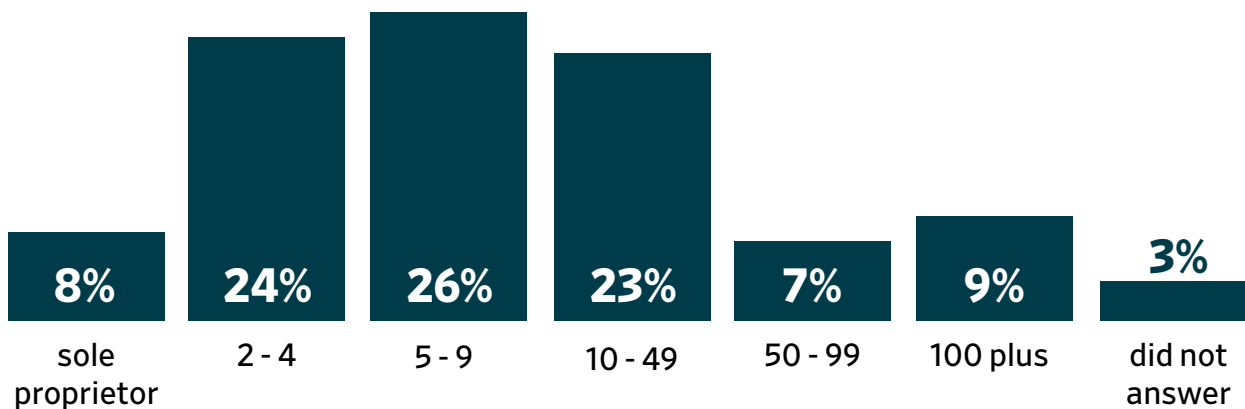
# Small Business Financial Relief

**Q:** What has been your experience, if any, in accessing financial relief for your business via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act?

Almost 60% of survey respondents said they applied for financial relief via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Over 90% were successful. A majority reported applying for the Payment Protection Program (PPP) and less than 10% referenced Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL). These loans also benefit the self-employed.

**92%**  
of respondents who applied received financial relief through the CARES Act

Many respondents found success in the second round of financial relief and had positive outcomes working with local banking partners rather than larger institutions.



**Firm size of those businesses that received financial relief through the CARES Act**

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# Small Business Financial Relief

**Q:** What has been your experience, if any, in accessing financial relief for your business via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act?

## Respondents' experiences

“Positive, but it took longer than anticipated to get the PPP funds.”

“Obtained EIDL advance and PPP loan. We were lucky because we do all our banking with a local community bank because they actually valued our business.”

“We were very successful at obtaining PPP assistance—our business manager got a great jump on both the application process and expanding our relationship with a smallish bank (one of several) that we work with that happened to be a bank involved in distributing federal funds. For us it went great.”

“It was very difficult, but after numerous applications we finally received relief.”

“We applied for and received the PPP loan through our local bank and the SBA. That will help us get through the next several months.”

“Pursuing the PPP loan was hugely stressful. We did not qualify in the first round but, after pursuing with multiple banks, qualified in the second round.”

“It was a pain, but with legal and banking advice, we were successful.”

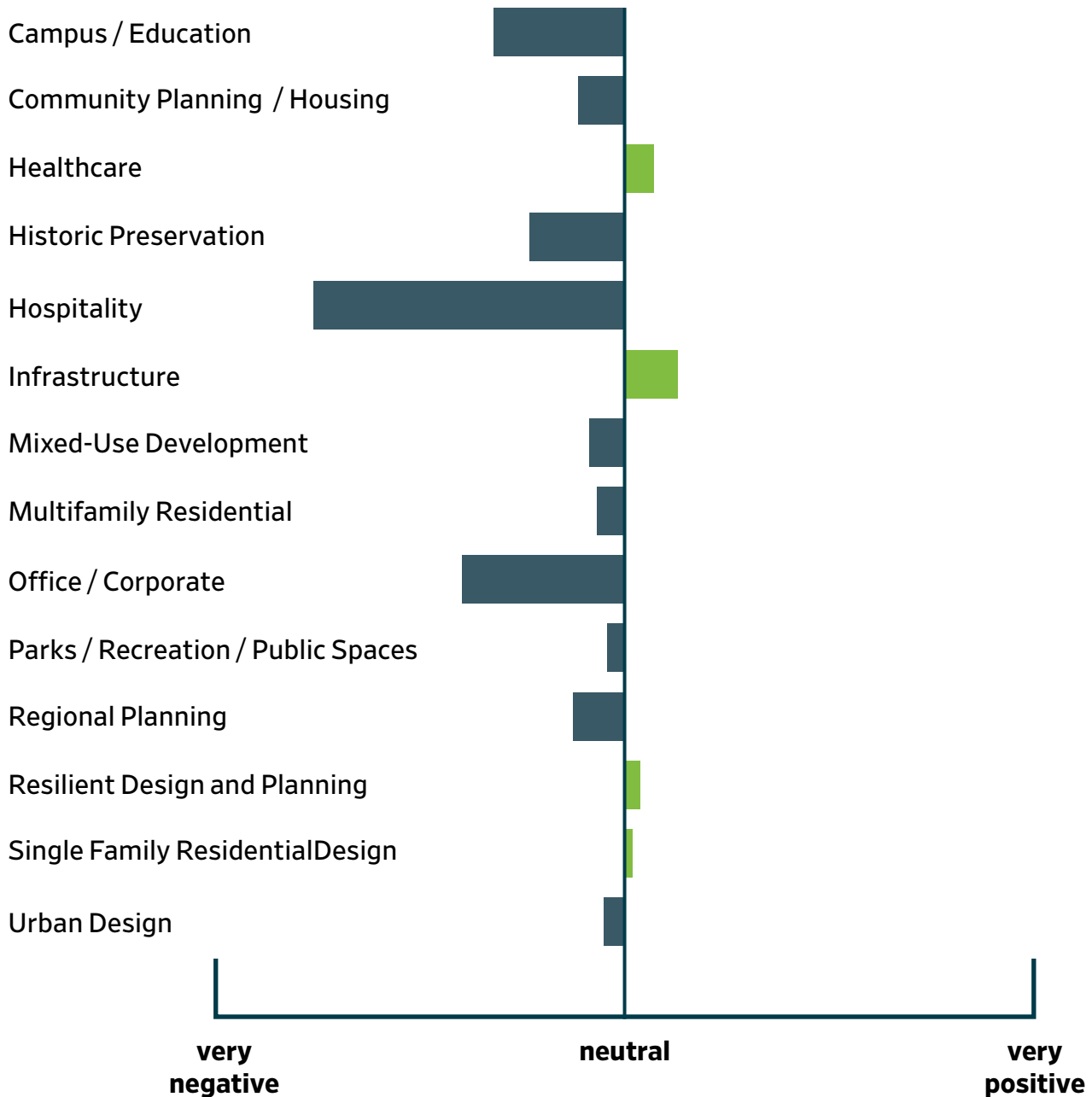
“We jumped on it! We have very good relationships with our bankers—so we were able to submit our application for the PPP the day after it became available. Although our loan amount was reduced by about 20% by the application reviewers, we received our funds from the PPP Program in less than 3 weeks. We were worried when the loan money ran out, but our banker said since our application had already been assigned a number by the SBA, we were in the initial group, and safe from elimination.”

“We received a grant from the SBA for emergency relief, and we have received PPP funding. These are complicated resources, where rules are changing daily.”

*“I was advised early in my business to develop a relationship with a local bank. Even though I am a very small business, they treated me as if I was their biggest client and I had PPP in the first round, so I have no complaints with obtaining the money. The problem is how to keep the records, so the PPP is forgiven. Not enough guidance from the Federal government, and the banks are overwhelmed at this point. So we are taking the more conservative approach and keeping multiple reports in various forms and hope that is correct.”*

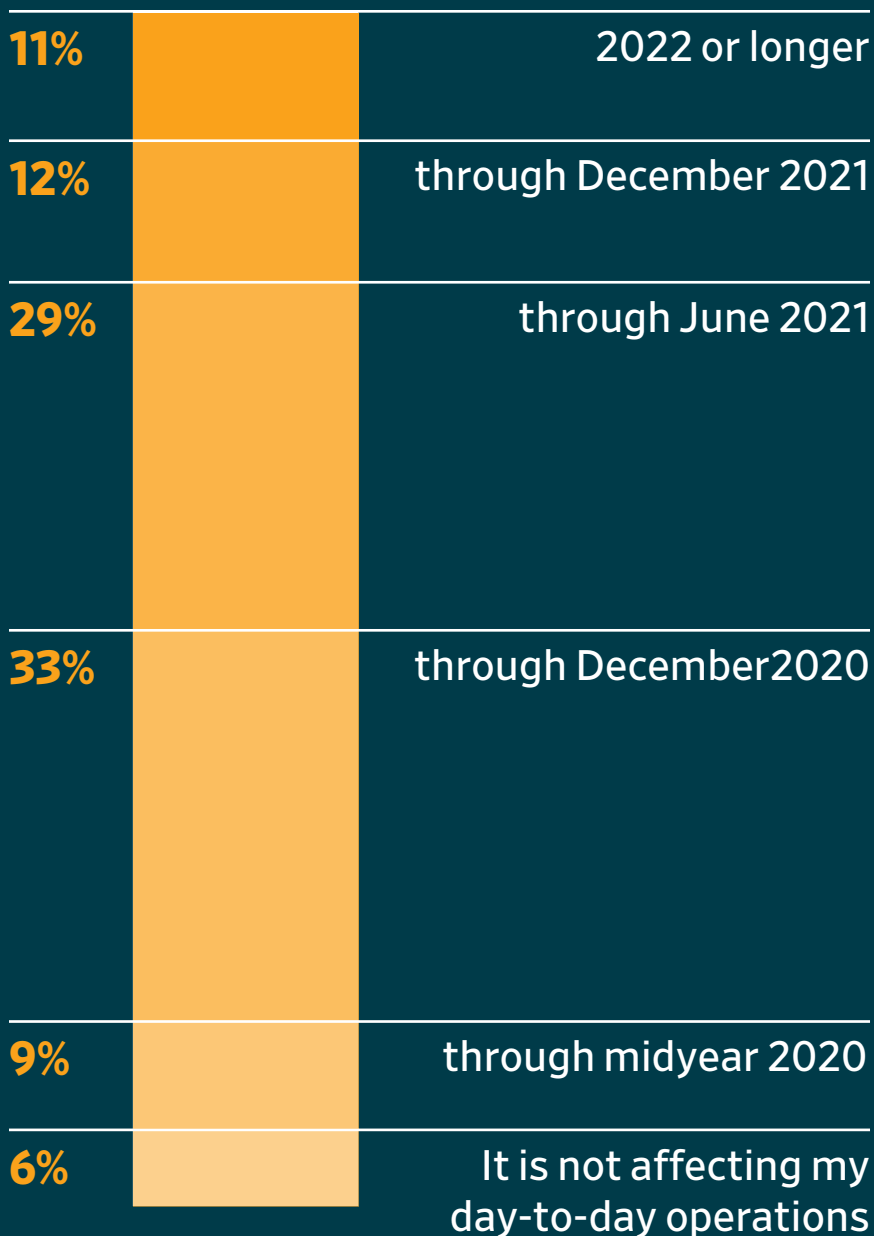
# Projections for Future Business

**Q:** How do you expect business conditions for the following market sectors to change in the next three to six months?



# Projections for Future Business

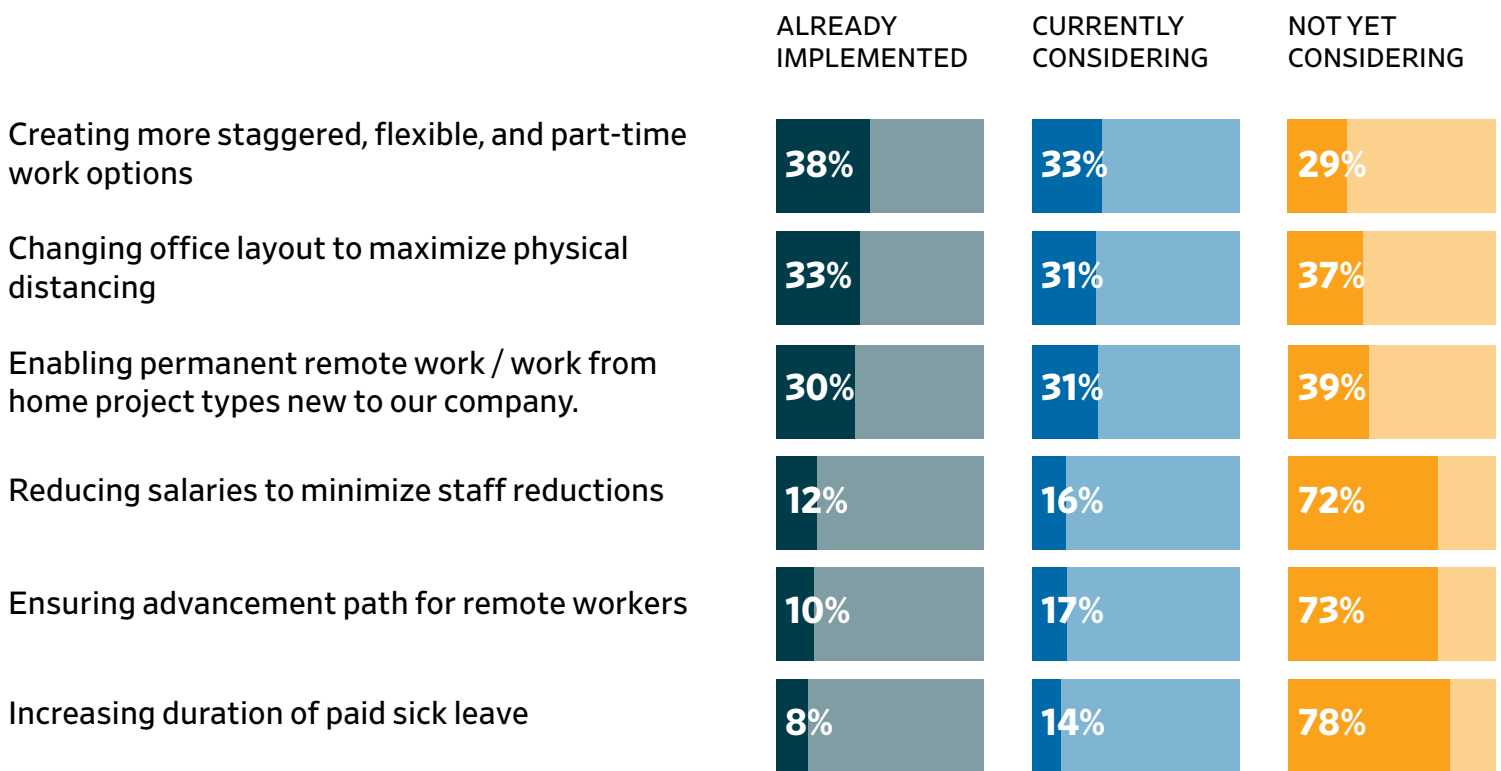
Q: How long do you expect the COVID-19 pandemic to have an impact your day-to-day operations?



# Measures Taken by Firms

## Employee Retention

Excluding sole proprietors, 68% of the respondents said their firm or organization has already taken, or plans to take, one or more actions to retain employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.



*“Increasing the amount of online continuing education sessions that our staff can access both within the firm (education sessions on software, business practices, etc.) and from vendors, contractors, etc. about new products or processes.”*

“We provided a survey to our employees similar to the ASLA. We wanted to know their concerns so that we can make an informed decision about the possibility of returning to the office.”

“Receiving the PPP loan allowed me to pay staff for more administrative duties while paying clients went on hold or stopped calling.”

“Virtual happy hours on Friday afternoons; sending gifts to all staff at home.”

“I provide paid sick leave with no limit to encourage staying home when ill, and being productive and healthy. It continues to work well.”

“provide more flex time / time off for employees to help with child care, family members”



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# Measures Taken by Firms

## Remote Work Technology

Almost 75% of respondents confirmed that their firm/department/organization has adopted, or is planning to adopt, new remote work, teleconferencing and/or group collaboration tool(s) that they did not have prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most ASLA members were quick to implement new remote work technologies into daily practice, as practitioners focused on keeping communications going among project team members and with clients and project stakeholders. An overwhelming majority of respondents are utilizing **Zoom** for videoconferencing. Watch ASLA's on-demand webinar, [Out of Office: Tools, Team, and Togetherness for Working from Home](#), for tips on how to actively sketch together with team members via Zoom annotations.

A majority of respondents say they are using **Microsoft Teams** as a communication and collaboration tool, offering chat, video meetings, file storage, and application integration. **Bluebeam** is also being used for redlining drawings, sketching, and real time project coordination.

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### Additional ASLA remote work technology resources:

[Out of Office: Remote Work 101](#) - The Field

[Tools, Team, and Togetherness for WFH summary document](#)

[Far from Business as Usual: Resources to Help You Adapt](#) - The Field

[Resources for Distance Learning: Grow Your Ability to Adapt](#) - The Field

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# Measures Taken by Firms

## Remote Work Technology

**Q:** What, if any, new skill sets are now in demand in your company/organization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



### Communications

“Advertising for Design Communications position who can greatly expand virtual communications, social media and client meeting collaboration tools”

“The ability to graphically convey ideas or concepts in the virtual meeting context—manipulating the programs tools to mark up plans in an active meeting.”

“Creative and aggressive business marketing”

“Digital conceptual design and website management.”

“We are developing better knowledge about public health pandemic planning which will impact future planning and design work”

### Project management

“Stronger clear project management. Not new, really just enhanced. Dealing effectively with clients working remotely making very detailed comments and reviews given extra available time”

“Being able to quickly adjust and adapt to any new regulations set forth by local, state, and federal government bodies. Being able to work with technology from a distance to complete work.”

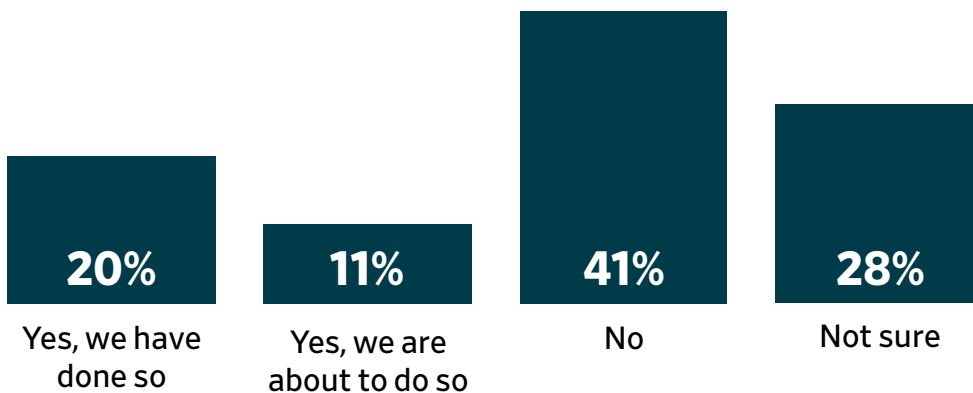
“The ability to work relatively independently has increased in value. Great communication of course, but that’s not new.”

“Being flexible, self starter/motivator and a problem solver.”

# Measures Taken by Firms

## Remote Work Policies

**Q:** Has your firm/department/organization adopted, or is it planning to adopt, any new remote work policies?



## Remote work policies adopted or considered

“When we return to the office, giving employees more flexibility in where they work. Before, we only had two people who worked one day a week at home (special circumstances)”

“Considering added flex for some team members, staggered hours, more even than present”

“Permanently terminating our office space lease and everyone working remotely with a shared work space for scheduled meetings.”

“People can work remotely indefinitely until there is a vaccine developed.”

“After that we are going to implement a policy so people can continue to work remotely part time.”

“We are considering extended remote work practice for the next 6-8 months. We are planning to switch the office setup to more shared office type for limited use.”

“We have considered closing our physical office and working permanently from home but are not sure of the negative impact that might have on maintaining a presence in our community.”

“Considering staggering time monthly, remote work can be up to 50% of time for each month”

“Milestone driven workplans [give] employees flexibility to work the hours they can [and balance] other demands as long as deliverable milestones can be met.”

**For more COVID-related business or professional development resources visit**

[www.asla.org/covidresources](http://www.asla.org/covidresources)

[www.asla.org/businessstoolkit.aspx](http://www.asla.org/businessstoolkit.aspx)

## **Contact Us**

For questions or comments, contact [propractice@asla.org](mailto:propractice@asla.org)



**ASLA**